

2001

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Recommended Citation

Bennett, Kymberley K. (2001) "Divorce in the family: how does it affect personality and views of love and marriage?," *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol7/iss1/3>

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Divorce in the Family: How Does It Affect Personality and Views of Love and Marriage?

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This study was conducted to investigate the impact of parental divorce on such personality variables as global optimism and self-esteem, and attitudes toward love and marriage. Eighty-seven women and 48 men enrolled in a small, private university participated in this study. A questionnaire was developed specifically for this study which included Sheier and Carver's (1985) Life Orientation Test, Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, and several other established measures. In addition, participants read five scenarios depicting couples on the verge of divorce and were asked to rate each impending divorce for its likelihood and its acceptability. Results indicated that all participants were fairly positive about their chances of having a successful marriage, as well as optimistic about their futures. Participants also seemed relatively neutral in their attitudes toward divorce in general, but seemed to become more "opinionated" when asked to rate specific cases involving divorce. Possible social implications are discussed regarding attitudes toward divorce, and the effect parental divorce seems to have on views of marriage and love.

Parents can make an enormous impression on their children's development. Through parents, children learn values and beliefs concerning such broad subjects as religion, interpersonal relationships, and politics. As children learn from their parents, they often imitate their parents' behaviors. Often, the first exposure children have to romantic relationships comes from their parents. When a divorce occurs, parents often model dysfunctional interpersonal relations and exchanges, and these, may, in turn be imitated by children in their own relationships. In support of this notion, Bandura's (1971, 1977, 1986) Social Learning Theory argues that children imitate behaviors and values modeled by their parents; during a divorce, children may be more apt to learn, observationally, about dysfunctional rather than functional relationships.

Parents can model both positive and negative values, which can be later imitated by

their children. For example, we can see positive values such as hard work and determination that have been modeled by parents, and in turn imitated by their children. On the other hand, negative values can be modeled by parents as well. For example, Katz and Gottman (1993) found that children could, in their parents. Katz and Gottman also found that children were likely to imitate their parents' conflict-management strategies.

Due to the marital conflict expressed by the couples in the Katz and Gottman (1993) study, it is safe to assume that these strategies were not successful. When looking at these results, one must wonder what can be modeled and imitated when children observe their parents' divorce. Because most divorces are not pleasant, it should not be surprising that research has shown a host of problems in children from divorced families. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of parental divorce on such personality variables as global optimism and self-esteem, as well as its impact on attitudes toward

love and marriage.

Immediate and Long-Term Effects of Divorce

Initial Adjustment to Divorce

Hetherington (1989) concluded that there seems to be a critical period of one year following a divorce that is accompanied by many hardships. This critical year is characterized by a serious disruption in the family structure as a result of the various changes occurring in the entire family. Most often the custodial parent is the mother, and she must deal with many hardships after the divorce. The hardships that ensue are characterized by frustration and anger as divorced mothers must cope with the reality of being a single-parent, having a lower income, and perhaps even having a lower standard of living. Shaw (1991) proposed that the loss of income often accompanying a divorce can affect children in two ways: "(A) indirectly through poorer parenting, as residential parents have less time and energy to give to their children because of the increased demands necessitated by the loss of income, and (B) directly through the changes in environmental circumstances caused by the divorce and subsequent loss of income, resulting in lower-quality schools and neighborhoods, and the loss of friends" (p. 470).

With the loss in income accompanying most divorces, many mothers are forced to work outside the home. It has been shown that some children from divorced homes are distressed by their working mothers; instead of realizing the necessity of work, they often feel rejected, or that their mothers are not interested in their lives (Wallerstein, 1987). Children may also be faced with disappointment from their fathers: Wallerstein (1987) found that most visitation patterns by fathers were very disappointing to their children because these patterns did not meet their children's needs, and McDermott (1970) found that children tended to internalize their father's resistance to pay child-support. In this study, children from divorced homes saw their father's resistance to pay child-support as a reflection of their own low self-worth.

Effects of Parental Conflict

Children's self-esteem has been found to vary with interparental conflict (Garber, 1992). Individuals whose parents' relationships were rated as high in conflict scored lower than their counterparts on measures of general and social self-esteem; this trend was independent of the individuals' parental marital status. However, while the intensity of conflict between parents

was not related to adjustment outcomes, Camara and Resnick (1989) concluded that the *strategies* parents used to resolve conflicts with each other were significantly related to children's adjustment measures. These authors found that those children who were exposed to higher levels of parental *cooperation* exhibited less aggression than their counterparts. Wood and Lewis (1990) concluded that post-divorce bonding and support between ex-spouses, especially concerning child-rearing, can be highly beneficial for children. They proposed that the coparental relationship *following* the divorce can affect the children as much as, or perhaps even more, than the actual divorce.

Psychological Functioning

Regardless of the age at which a divorce occurs, the childhood trauma of experiencing a divorce seems to remain very vivid into adulthood (Wallerstein, 1986). At the ten-year mark of her longitudinal study Wallerstein found that 40% of the individuals studied had easily accessible memories of the divorce, especially of the separation. In fact, for over 80% of the individuals studied, it appeared that the divorce continued to affect their present psychological functioning. For example, participants said, "My life would have been happier if my parents hadn't divorced" (p. 440), or "Divorce was better for them but not for me. I lost my family" (p. 440).

Wallerstein (1986) also concluded that much of the anger present in the children at the five-year mark of her study had dissipated in intensity by the ten-year follow-up, although almost one-half of the individuals still retained *some* anger. This dissipation of anger paralleled the children's reassessment of the parental decision to divorce. Nearly two-thirds of the individuals studied had concluded that "their parents were ill suited to each other and approved the divorce at this time as both inevitable and necessary" (p. 441). Although many of the individuals came to an understanding about their parents' divorce, they remained critical of their parents' choice of entering into a "misguided marriage" (p. 442). Many participants were extremely critical of their parents for not rectifying their troubled marriages before children were born. Anger directed at parents for not divorcing prior to having children was very clear: one participant said, "I wish that it had never happened. You can undo a marriage, but you can't undo a child" (p. 442).

Spigelman, Spigelman, and Engleson (1994) concluded that those individuals who agreed their parents' divorce was wise were likely

to have received an explanation about the reasons for the divorce, and they were not entertaining any hopes of reunion between their parents. Of those individuals from divorced homes who remained angry about their parents' marital dissolution, many were very critical of their parents' behavior during the marriage. In fact, these individuals considered their parents' behavior immoral, and many embraced a morality that was much more traditional than that of their parents (Wallerstein, 1986).

Views of Marriage and Relationships

The long-term effects of divorce can also be seen in children's views of marriage and interpersonal relationships. For example, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) found that the majority of girls from divorced families were very anxious about making commitments and were consciously preoccupied with fears of being betrayed. Among boys from divorced families, Wallerstein (1987) found a common fear of being unloved. Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, and Roberts (1990) found that children from divorced families felt they were less likely than their counterparts to have long and successful marriages, supporting the findings of Wallerstein (1987; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Respondents from divorced and intact families in the Franklin et al. (1990) study differed on measures of interpersonal trust. Participants from divorced families reported trusting their *present* dating partner as much as their intact counterparts, but the groups differed when asked about their *expected* trust in a spouse: individuals from divorced homes reported lower expectations of spousal trust than individuals from intact homes. Participants from divorced families also responded similarly to their intact counterparts when asked about their expectations for success in their *present* romantic relationships, but the two groups differed when asked about their *expected* success in marriage: individuals from divorced families reported lower expectations of marital success than individuals from intact families.

Although Wallerstein (1986) found that children from divorced homes reported being eager for a lasting marriage, they did express some reservations. Children from divorced families felt that marriages should not occur early or impulsively, and believed that living with a partner for several years prior to marriage would be a viable strategy to prevent divorce in their own marriages. Further, these individuals stressed the need for a second delay of several years before children were conceived to ensure the stability of the marriage.

In addition to these views of marriage, children from divorced families tended to be more accepting of divorce than children from intact families (Franklin et al., 1990; Greenberg & Nay, 1982). For example, Kulka and Weingarten (1982) found that men from divorced homes, more so than their intact counterparts, were likely to agree that divorce was often the best solution for unresolvable marital disputes. Not surprisingly, Pope and Mueller (1976) found that children from divorced families have higher rates of divorce or separation in their first marriages than do children from intact families.

Hypotheses

With the extensive research documenting the potential problems experienced by children as a result of their parents' divorce, one must wonder if observational learning in dysfunctional families is to blame. We must ask ourselves if the marital conflict witnessed by children manifests itself in overt problems later in the child's development. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of parental divorce on such personality variables as global optimism and self-esteem, and attitudes toward love and marriage. The following was predicted:

Hypothesis #1:

Because Taylor and Brown (1988) found that most people hold unrealistically positive views of themselves, it was predicted that participants from intact families would not significantly differ from participants from divorced families on measures of self-esteem and global optimism. Although Brubeck and Beer (1992) found that self-esteem scores were lower in children from divorced families compared to children from intact families, it was predicted that our unrealistically positive views would triumph in this battle, and that all participants would score relatively high on measures of self-esteem and on measures of global optimism.

Hypothesis #2:

Because girls from divorced families have been found to be anxious about making commitments and preoccupied with fears of betrayal (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989), and because children from divorced families have differed from their counterparts in expected trust in a spouse and expected success of marriage (Franklin et al., 1990), it was predicted that participants from divorced families would have a more negative view about getting married and the responsibilities that go along with marriage than their counterparts from intact families.

Hypothesis #3:

Consistent with the findings of Franklin

et al. (1990) and Greenberg and Nay (1982) it was predicted that participants from divorced families would be more accepting of divorce than their counterparts from intact families.

Hypothesis #4:

Participants from intact and divorced families were not expected to differ significantly on measures of their ideal love, but would differ on measures of how powerful love can be. Thus, it was predicted that participants from intact families would adhere to a view of love that encompassed a high degree of "power" (i.e., because it had kept their parents together), while participants from divorced homes would score lower on measures of the "power" of love (i.e., there was no powerful love that kept their parents from divorcing).

Hypothesis #5:

Because it has been found that parental conflict is negatively correlated with self-esteem scores (Garber, 1992; Lawler & Lennings, 1992), it was predicted that participants who reported a high level of family conflict would have lower self-esteem than participants who reported a low level of family conflict.

Hypothesis #6:

Participants' ratings of their parents' marital happiness would be positively correlated with their ratings of how "powerful" love can be. Thus, it was predicted that participants who saw their parents' marriages as happy would generalize this happiness to their own prospective relationships and believe that love is a powerful, interpersonal force.

Hypothesis #7:

Because Weiner (1993) found that individuals who are not responsible for their illnesses elicit more pity and liking than do their responsible counterparts, it was predicted that participants would rate domestic abuse and infidelity as significantly more acceptable reasons for divorce than financial difficulties, lack of communication, and life interests growing apart. This trend was predicted because domestic abuse and infidelity could be considered out of the control of one of the spouses. In essence, participants were expected to rate the reasons for divorce within the couples' control (financial difficulties, lack of communication, and life interests growing apart) as less acceptable than those divorces in which one partner is the physical aggressor or cheater.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 135 college students, 87 women (64%), and 48 men (36%). The mean age of the sample was 20.06 years. The sample included 90 Caucasians (67%), 19 Hispanics (14%), 11 Asians (8%), 4 African-Americans (3%), and 10 participants (8%) who labeled their ethnicity as "other." The sample included 87 participants from intact families (64%), 42 participants from divorced families (31%), 4 participants reporting at least one parent deceased (3%), and 2 participants (2%) who labeled their family status as "other." Of the participants from divorced families, infidelity was reported to be the most common reason for their parents' divorce (22%), followed by lack of communication (20%), life interests growing apart (18%), alcoholism (8%), financial difficulties (6%), and domestic abuse (6%). The remaining responses included an unidentified "other" (12%), and "unknown" (8%) as reasons for their parents' divorce. Most individuals in the sample reported that they intended to marry someday (86%), while some reported they were unsure (13%), and one participant reported that he/she would never marry (less than 1%).

Materials

A questionnaire was utilized for this research. The first part of the questionnaire contained 9 questions concerning sex, age, ethnicity, and the marital status of the participants' parents. The participants from divorced families were asked to report their age when their parents divorced, as well as the main reason, they believed, for their parents' marital split. Although participants were asked to supply one reason, many gave more than just one. In addition, participants were asked to rate their parents' marriage using a 7-point scale (1 = extremely happy; 7 = extremely unhappy). The first part of the questionnaire also contained items asking whether the subjects intended to marry at some point in their lives, and if not, whether they intended to cohabit with a life-long partner. Lastly, participants were asked to respond to the following question, "Using the following scale, to what extent do you find divorce, in general, acceptable or unacceptable?" by use of a 7-point scale (1 = extremely acceptable; 7 = extremely unacceptable).

The second part of the questionnaire included Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, a 10-item measure of global self-esteem, and

Sheier and Carver's (1985) Life Orientation Test, a 12-item measure of dispositional optimism. In addition, two of the three subscales from Munro and Adams' (1978) Love Attitude Scale were used. The first subscale, Romantic Ideal, was a 9-item measure of a belief in idealistic love. The second subscale, Romantic Power, was a 9-item measure of a belief in love as a powerful, interpersonal force. Lastly, an adapted version of Wallin's (1954) Favorableness of Attitude to Marriage Scale was used. After validating the scale on a pilot sample of 20 students, one question was deleted, resulting in a scale with very good reliability (coefficient alpha = .81). A 4-point Likert-type scale for assessing compliance with the various items was added to replace the forced-choice method used by Wallin (i.e., 1 = not at all; 4 = very much; or 1 = not at all difficult; 4 = very difficult; or 1 = never; 4 = frequently). The modified 8-item scale was used to assess the participants' attitudes toward marriage.

The third part of the questionnaire included two subscales from Moos and Moos' (1994) Family Environment Scale. The first subscale, Cohesion, was a 9-item measure of "the degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another" (p. 1). The second subscale, Conflict, was a 9-item measure of "the amount of openly expressed anger and conflict among family members" (p. 1). Participants were asked to indicate whether the items within the subscales were true or untrue for their family currently, as well as whether the statements were true or untrue for their family in the past. Participants from divorced families and participants with deceased parents were asked to base their responses reflecting their family's past functioning on their experiences before their parents divorced, or before either parent died, respectively. If these participants could not recall this time period (i.e., before the divorce or death), they were asked to check a box, and their responses were not added to the data.

The fourth part of the questionnaire was comprised of five scenarios depicting marriages at risk of divorce. Five reasons for divorce were supplied in the scenarios: a) financial troubles; b) lack of communication; c) domestic abuse; d) infidelity; and, e) growing apart. Each scenario contained a couple, both employed, who were earning modest incomes. Each couple had at least one child and had been married for approximately 10 years. All variables, except the reason for the marital troubles, were held constant (as much as possible). The names used in each scenario were selected from Kasof (1993) and were known

to be matched for opposite-sex stimulus persons. After reading each scenario, the participants were asked to respond to two questions. First they were asked, "How likely do you think it is that this marriage will end in divorce?", by use of a 7-point scale (1 = extremely unlikely; 7 = extremely likely). Next they were posed the question, "If the marriage ends in divorce, to what degree do you find that acceptable/unacceptable?", using a 7-point scale (1 = extremely acceptable; 7 = extremely unacceptable).

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire in several lower- and upper-division psychology and business courses at a small, private university in Southern California. The participants completed the entire questionnaire individually, taking approximately 20 minutes to complete it. The participants were only instructed that the questionnaire was part of a senior research project.

RESULTS

Tests of Hypotheses

Consistent with Hypothesis #1, participants from divorced families did not differ from participants from intact families on measures of self-esteem and global optimism [$t(106) = -1.12$, n.s., and $t(124) = -.51$, n.s., respectively].

Contrary to Hypothesis #2, participants from divorced families *did not* have more negative views of marriage than their counterparts from intact families, as measured by the Favorableness of Attitude to Marriage Scale [$t(124) = 1.48$, n.s.]. Rather, the mean score on this scale was 22.21 for the entire sample, demonstrating that most participants held a quite positive view of marriage (the minimum possible score was 8, while the maximum possible was 32).

Contrary to Hypothesis #3, participants from divorced homes *did not* rate divorce as significantly more acceptable than participants from intact homes [$t(127) = -.09$, n.s.]. In fact, the mean response for this item probing the acceptability of divorce was 4.15, indicating neutrality. Thus, the participants in this sample seem to be rather neutral about their perceived acceptability of divorce.

Consistent with Hypothesis #4, participants from divorced families did not differ from their counterparts on beliefs about an "ideal" love [$t(125) = .78$, n.s.], but did differ in their beliefs about a "powerful" love [$t(125)$

TABLE ONE

Family Atmosphere Variables			
	Present Conflict	Past Conflict	Present Cohesion
1. Attitude towards divorce	-.10	-.04	.14
2. Belief in "Ideal" love	-.12	-.06	.11
3. Belief in "Powerful" love	-.05	-.04	.06
4. Attitude towards marriage	-.33**	-.18	.14
<p>*p < .05 **p < .01</p>			

= 2.12, $p < .05$], with participants from intact families scoring higher ($M = 28.39$) than participants from divorced families ($M = 25.90$). Thus, the sample did not differ in terms of an "ideal" love, but participants from intact homes demonstrated a stronger belief in love as a "powerful, interpersonal force" than their counterparts.

Contrary to Hypothesis #5, family conflict (whether presently, or in the past) was not negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -.14$, n.s., and $r = -.13$, n.s., respectively). However, a positive correlation was found between family cohesion (presently and in the past) and self-esteem ($r = .19$, $p < .05$, and $r = .22$, $p < .01$, respectively). Although family conflict was not associated with low self-esteem, family cohesion seemed to be a factor in high self-esteem. Interestingly, family conflict, presently and in the past, was negatively correlated with global optimism (see Table 1). As family conflict rises, global optimism decreases. In other words, family cohesion seemed to be a better predictor of self-esteem than family conflict, while family conflict was negatively associated with global optimism.

Consistent with Hypothesis #6, a correlation was found between participants' ratings of their parents' marriages and their ratings of how powerful love can be ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$). Thus, participants who rated their parents' marriages as being happy, also rated love as a "powerful interpersonal force." In essence, the participants appear to generalize from their parents' happiness to a belief in a powerful love.

Consistent with Hypothesis #7, participants rated domestic abuse and infidelity as significantly more acceptable than the three other reasons for divorce [$F(4, 133) = 154.36$, $p < .0001$]. In other words, participants rated abuse ($M = 1.99$) and infidelity ($M = 1.56$) as more acceptable reasons for divorce than financial troubles ($M = 3.83$), lack of communication ($M = 2.66$), and partners growing apart ($M = 3.21$). Interestingly, participants' acceptability ratings of abuse and infidelity were very similar (mostly rated as acceptable); participants did not seem to differentiate between these two reasons for divorce.

t-tests

A few significant gender differences were

found. Women ($M = 3.94$) found divorce to be less acceptable than males ($M = 4.52$) [$t(133) = -1.94, p < .05$]. In addition to this general gender difference, several others were found when comparing men's and women's responses to the five scenarios depicting couples on the verge of divorce. First, men and women differed in their ratings of how likely they thought the couple in which the husband was having an extramarital affair would divorce. Men ($M = 2.04$) rated the divorce as significantly *more likely* than did women ($M = 2.52$) [$t(131) = 2.32, p < .05$]. Conversely, women ($M = 1.38$) rated the divorce as *more acceptable* than did the men ($M = 1.87$) [$t(68) = -2.75, p < .01$]. In other words, although men perceived the divorce as more likely to occur than women, the women in the sample rated the divorce as more acceptable than their counterparts.

Males and females also differed in their *acceptability* ratings for the couple in which the husband had been physically abusing his wife such that women ($M = 1.79$) rated the impending divorce as *more acceptable* than men ($M = 2.34$) [$t(70) = -2.57, p < .01$]. Men and women also differed in their ratings of the likelihood and acceptability of the impending divorce for the couple who felt their life interests had grown apart [$t(131) = -2.08, p < .05$, and $t(131) = -2.61, p < .01$, respectively]. Women ($M = 2.69$) deemed the marriage to be *more likely* to end in divorce than men ($M = 3.06$), and also ($M = 3.02$) deemed the divorce to be *more acceptable* than men ($M =$

TABLE TWO

Correlations Between Personality Variables		
	Self-Esteem	Global Optimism
1. Attitude towards divorce	.19*	.04
2. Belief in "Ideal" love	.09	.14
3. Belief in "Powerful" love	-.03	.01
4. Attitude towards marriage	.27**	.28***
5. Rating of parental marriage	-.03	-.06
6. Present family conflict	-.14	.20*
7. Present family cohesion	.19*	.08
8. Past family conflict	-.13	-.19*
9. Past family cohesion	.22**	.17
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$		

3.55).

T-tests were performed to determine whether any significant differences emerged between participants from divorced families and their counterparts from intact families. Of the t-tests performed, only one significant difference emerged: ratings of family cohesion in the past [$t(111) = 2.77, p < .01$]. Participants from intact families ($M = 6.80$) reported a higher level of family cohesion in the past than did their counterparts ($M = 5.31$).

Personality Variables

In Table 1, moderate positive correlations were found between attitudes. As demonstrated in Table 2, family conflict and family cohesion did not

TABLE THREE

<u>Love and Marriage Variables</u>			
	Attitude towards marriage	Attitude towards divorce	Belief in "Powerful" love
1. Money problems— likelihood	.03	.13	.13
2. Money problems— (un)acceptability	.54****	.21*	.36****
3. Lack of commun.— likelihood	.01	-.04	-.06
4. Lack of commun.— (un)acceptability	.45****	.15	.13
5. Domestic Abuse— likelihood	-.19*	-.37****	-.11
6. Domestic Abuse— (un)acceptability	.15	.18*	-.10
7. Infidelity— likelihood	-.21**	-.29***	-.16
8. Infidelity— (un)acceptability	.16	.19*	-.08
9. Growing Apart— likelihood	.14	.01	.06
10. Growing Apart— (un)acceptability	.52****	.29***	.31***
<p>*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001 ****p < .0001</p>			

correlate with attitudes towards divorce, a belief in an "ideal" love, or a belief in a "powerful" love. However, present family conflict was negatively correlated with attitudes toward marriage ($r = -.33, p < .01$). In essence, as present family conflict

Family Atmosphere Variables

Increases, attitudes towards marriage became more negative. toward marriage and self-esteem, and between attitudes toward marriage and global optimism. Self-esteem and global optimism seem to be related to positive views of marriage. Not surprisingly, there was a strong correlation between self-esteem and optimism ($r = .65, p < .0001$).

Love and Marriage Variables

In Table 3, moderate positive correlations were found between participants' attitudes toward divorce and their unacceptability ratings

of three impending divorces: a) financial difficulties; b) lack of communication; and c) growing apart. However, participants' general attitudes toward divorce were not related to their ratings of the other two impending divorces: a) infidelity and b) domestic abuse. In addition, a belief in love as a powerful force was negatively correlated with participants' ratings of the likelihood of divorce for the couples suffering through infidelity and domestic abuse. In essence, participants who believed, to a high degree, that love was a powerful, interpersonal force did not generalize this belief to the marriages involving infidelity and abuse. Rather, these individuals viewed the impending divorces as quite likely, demonstrating a limit to their perceptions about the power of love.

Positive correlations also were found between a

positive attitude toward marriage and the unacceptability ratings of divorces involving financial difficulties and partners growing apart. In other words, participants with positive views of marriage rated the impending divorces involving financial difficulties and interests growing apart as unacceptable.

DISCUSSION

Results indicated that participants in this study held positive views of themselves, as well as of their futures.

Participants from divorced families did not differ from their counterparts from intact families on measures of global optimism and self-esteem. It appears that parental divorce does not affect these core aspects of personality. In fact, the mean score for the measure of self-esteem across the sample was 33.01, higher than the mean reported by Rosenberg (1965) in his original article ($M = 29.4$). With a maximum possible score of 40, participants displayed quite positive attitudes about themselves. Furthermore, Baumeister and Hutton (1989) concluded that most people rate themselves as above average on self-esteem scales, while infrequently scoring below a scale's conceptual midpoint.

Participants from divorced homes did not view marriage more negatively than their counterparts, despite witnessing their parents' divorce. In fact, all participants seemed to hold fairly positive views of marriage. Furthermore, high self-esteem and high global-optimism were both positively correlated with attitudes toward marriage; as self-esteem and global optimism rose, so did positive views of marriage. Thus, as people felt good about themselves and their futures, they also felt good about getting married and the responsibilities that go along with marriage. These results showing high levels of optimism, as well as favorable views of marriage, may be explained, in part, by our unrealistically positive outlook on life. Weinstein (1980) found that people tend to believe that their own likelihood of experiencing positive events was higher than those around them. These positive events included liking one's first job, having a good salary, or having a gifted child (Taylor & Brown, 1988). In contrast, people tended to downplay their chances of experiencing negative events in their lives such as becoming ill (Perloff & Fetzer, 1986) or having difficulty finding a job

(Weinstein, 1980). People tended to believe that their chances were slimmer than their peers of having such things happen. Taylor and Brown (1988) sum up this phenomenon by stating, "In effect, most people seem to be saying, 'The future will be great, especially for me'" (p. 197).

People also tended to believe that they would do better than others on future tasks (Crandall, Solomon, & Kelleway, 1955), especially on those tasks which were considered to be personally important (Frank, 1953). It can be suggested, therefore, that if marriage is considered to be an important aspect of life, it will be looked upon favorably, and that individuals will remain optimistic about their chances of happiness. Taylor and Brown (1988) stated that normal individuals did tend to hold unrealistically positive views of themselves and their futures. When related to this study, these overly optimistic views of marriage may enable people to distort negative information in a non-threatening manner, so as to protect their mental health. If one can ignore or minimize all negative information about marriage (i.e., divorce statistics), one might still be able to believe in the goodness of it. Thus, one might say, "Yes, divorce happens, but not to me in my marriage." This sort of optimism may be most pronounced if a person finds marriage very personally important, as reported by Frank (1953).

Results did not show that participants from divorced families found divorce more acceptable than participants from intact families. It was hypothesized that participants from divorced homes would rate divorce as more acceptable than

their counterparts as a means, perhaps, of validating their parents' choice to split, but this did not seem to be the case. Participants were quite neutral regarding the acceptability of divorce. As discussed in the Results section, the mean response to the question probing their attitudes yielded a neutral mean of 4.15 (on a 7-point Likert scale). This mean response would suggest that participants may not have had a general "feel" for the acceptability of divorce, but rather judged each case as dependent upon the situation.

In this study women rated three of the five causes for divorce as significantly more acceptable than men did, but at the same time

rated divorce, in general, as less acceptable than their male counterparts. In essence, these women found divorce generally unacceptable, but when faced with concrete examples, changed their ideals to correspond with the situation and circumstances. These results lend support to the proposition that acceptability ratings of divorce are to a great extent dependent upon the situation. This trend in the formation of attitudes is supported by the findings of Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) and Wicker (1969) who have suggested that general attitudes do not predict specific actions/behaviors very well. When applied to this study, we would then expect that a general attitude toward divorce does not predict (with much confidence) how participants rate specific instances of divorce in terms of acceptability.

Participants from divorced families scored similarly to participants from intact families on measures of "ideal" love, but the groups differed when asked about how "powerful" they believed love to be. These results indicated that all participants shared a similar perception of an "ideal" love, perhaps one available to all who watch television or read books and magazines. Thus, it is easy to understand why all participants, regardless of parental marital status, have a similar view of what an "ideal" love entails.

On the other hand, participants from divorced homes scored lower than their counterparts on a measure of how "powerful" love can be. This finding may be explained by the fact that these individuals most likely witnessed the "demise" of their parents' marriages. Perhaps by witnessing their parents' divorces, and thus *not* seeing a powerful love at work between their parents, these individuals adhere to their ideals, but fall short of believing in a "powerful" love that surmounts all obstacles. Consistent with this notion is the finding that participants' rating of their parents' marriages were correlated with their ratings of love as a "powerful" interpersonal force.

In sum, as participants viewed their parents' marriages as being happy, they also scored higher on the belief that love is "powerful." This finding points to the fact that people may generalize much information from the first intimate relationship they are exposed to: that of their parents'.

There did, however, seem to be a limit to

this belief in a "powerful" love; across all subjects, a negative correlation was found between the belief in a "powerful" love and ratings of the infidelity and domestic abuse couples' likelihood of divorce. Participants seemed to demonstrate their knowledge that not every marriage can be saved, but that some divorces are truly in the best interests of all concerned.

Although prior researchers have found that parental conflict was associated with low self-esteem scores (Garber, 1992; Lawler and Lennings, 1992), this relationship was not found within this study. Participants were asked to report the degree of *family* conflict rather than *parental* conflict, which may be an entirely different type of discord. It seems improbable that any family could live together without conflict, so perhaps family conflict (as measured by the Moos and Moos Family Environment Scale) is tapping into a different kind of conflict than the conflict measured by previous researchers. Interestingly, family cohesion (both presently and in the past) was found to be positively correlated with self-esteem. It appears that those families who are most cohesive may equip their children with the tools needed to feel good about themselves, while research has shown that parental conflict may strip children of those same tools (Garber, 1992; Lawler and Lennings, 1992).

Perhaps just as parental conflict can be internalized by a child to reflect his or her own self-worth (McDermott, 1970), cohesive relationships within a family may be internalized, as well. Because Bandura's (1971, 1977, 1986) Social Learning Theory proposes that children imitate behaviors modeled by their parents, it may be suggested that children imitate the behaviors associated with cohesive relationships (e.g., mutual respect, caring for one another, open communication, etc.) in other contexts. Behaving in a manner that is associated with cohesive relationships may prompt those traits in others, making children feel good about themselves.

Although not related to low self-esteem, family conflict, both presently and in the past, was found to be negatively correlated with global optimism. Although, as Taylor and Brown (1988) state, we are able to diffuse much incoming negative information by our unrealistically positive outlooks, perhaps family conflict is

internalized (much like how parental conflict can be internalized to reflect one's self-worth) and leads to a pessimistic world-view. One might suggest that high levels of family conflict would be a constant fixture within a home, a part of life that a child may not be able to erase by employing unrealistic optimism. If a child is bombarded with family conflict day-in and day-out, a child may start to think there is no escaping this sort of unhappiness; this belief, in turn, may affect his or her outlook on life. Present family conflict was also found to be negatively correlated with attitudes toward marriage. Perhaps after witnessing a high level of family conflict, participants believed that marriage would result in the same conflict and discord, and therefore looked unfavorably upon it. It may be suggested that those participants coming from highly volatile families simply wish to remain single so as to avoid the climate they grew up in.

Results also seemed to indicate that participants judged reasons for divorce that were under the control of one spouse as being less acceptable than divorce reasons perceived to be uncontrollable by at least one spouse. More specifically, participants rated domestic abuse and infidelity as more acceptable than financial difficulties, lack of communication, and life interests growing apart. Because of the manner of presentation of each scenario, the marriages involving domestic abuse and infidelity were clearly out of the control of one of the spouses. On the other hand, the scenarios involving financial difficulties, lack of communication, and growing apart were clearly reasons for divorce under the control of both spouses; both spouses had the power to change the relationship with effort. Weiner (1993) noted, "Without question, individuals who fail because of lack of effort are evaluated more negatively than are those who fail because of a lack of ability" (p. 959). Thus, as was found, we would predict that couples not putting forth much effort to save their marriages (and perhaps taking the "easy" way out) would be viewed negatively. Although lack of effort was not examined in this study, we do see that acceptability ratings are lower for those couples not willing to extend the effort to save their marriages.

Participants seemed to rate those marriages in need of "work" as being the ones to save. In other words, participants did not feel

pity or liking for those couples who were unwilling to work on saving their marriages. This trend seems to be consistent with Weiner's (1993) model. In fact, Weiner wrote, "...in many instances divorce invokes anger and avoidance. Thus, even in our 'liberated' culture, reactions to the loss of a spouse (of either gender) depend on the reason for that separation and associated beliefs about moral responsibility" (p. 960). Clearly, this phenomenon has occurred in this study. Participants rated divorces with an "identifiable" victim as more acceptable than those without a victim.

In light of the findings discussed above, there are several limitations to this study. First, because the nature of the study included self-report data, we must wonder whether all responses were completely valid. With self-reports, participants may desire to present themselves in a favorable light, and thus adjust their answers to be socially desirable. Second, the significant correlations cited above were moderate in size, which may be due to the fairly large sample size (whereby small differences between groups may be more pronounced). Because most significant correlations ranged from $+/- .20$ to $+/- .40$, it is obvious that the percentage of the variance explained between variables was fairly low. In order to draw more robust conclusions from the data, higher correlations would be needed. Third, the high number of t-tests performed during the data analyses might have prompted Type I errors; with a large number of t-tests one is bound to find some significant differences between groups merely by chance.

The last and perhaps most important limitation to this study involves the nature of the sample; because all participants were recruited from a private university, one might argue that this sample does not adequately represent college students in general. This assumption can be made because of the prohibitive costs associated with attending a private university, especially for those participants coming from divorced homes in which one parent usually must take on the majority of childrearing, and therefore financial, responsibilities. It may be assumed that those participants from divorced homes within this study were most likely to have been a) financially stable after the divorce, which would probably

indicate at least a middle-class standing before the divorce or b) children who witnessed their parents' divorce quite a while ago allowing the custodial parent sufficient time to "rebuild" financially and be able to afford high tuition rates. Because the divorced subsample may not adequately represent children from divorced homes in general, the results cited above may reflect adjustment and attitudes in children from divorced families who have a high level of functioning.

The results cited above should be interpreted with caution because attitudes and beliefs of middle-class individuals may be very different from those of lower-class individuals simply because of different life experiences. Because of the high costs of attending a private university, it may be assumed that most participants came from *at least* a middle-class social standing. In order to adequately obtain a representative subsample of college students, future research should be carried out at state universities, or local, junior colleges, as they tend to have a broader cross-section of the population.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study seem to demonstrate that some aspects of personality (such as self-esteem and optimism) are fairly immune to being affected by parental divorce. On the other hand, views of how "powerful" love can be seem to be affected by parental divorce. Although there are certainly personality differences among children from divorced homes, parental cooperation, as well as low levels of conflict, seem to be the best solutions when a marriage cannot be saved. Although some conflict is unavoidable when a marriage ends, cooperation among parents may be imitated by children (as suggested by Bandura's Social Learning Theory) in their own relationships, prompting a healthier psychological lifestyle than those children exposed to a high degree of parental conflict during marital dissolution. As stated earlier, Wood and Lewis (1990) suggest that the coparental relationship following the divorce can affect the children as much as, or even more, than the actual divorce. This conclusion gives hope for those marriages resulting in divorce; it seems important to remember that children can benefit greatly from divorcing parents who curb their anger in front of their children. Although no divorce can be pleasant, research seems to

show that many core aspects of personality are fairly resilient against the effects of divorce. It also seems quite obvious from the results cited above that most individuals hold a fairly positive view of themselves, and of their futures. This trend appears to be independent of parental marital status. In essence, most individuals seemed to be fairly confident that they will enjoy a happy marriage, as well as remaining very optimistic about their future chances of positive events occurring in their lives. Views regarding divorce seem equally as promising: on the whole, participants seem fairly neutral in the judgments of divorce in general, but seemed much more opinionated when asked about specific instances of divorcing couples. This finding is very encouraging because people may be more hesitant to make sweeping judgments, and more willing to make decisions on a one-to-one basis. This shift in decision-making can only be beneficial, as it seems clear that some couples are better off splitting. Greater tolerance for individual differences can only result in a more tolerant society, one in which "black and white" decision-makers will clearly be in the minority. Although sweeping generalizations may be easiest for us, psychologically, we must strive to treat each situation with the care and sensitivity it deserves.

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